

ETSINGER'S TIPS ON QUOTATIONS, STRUCTURE, LEDES

Jean Etsinger, journalism professor at the University of the Virgin Islands, has pulled together these helpful hints for news reporters, reviewers and columnists.

ATTRIBUTION OF QUOTATIONS

Here are a few general principles, frequently ignored, on the use of direct quotations.

1. A direct quotation must be specifically attributed to the speaker. The attribution must be fastened grammatically to the quotation. It is not enough to imply the speaker's identity through the context of the story.

Wrong: Alfred panicked. "That truck is out of control, and it's headed for us."

Right: Alfred panicked. "That truck is out of control," he said, "and it's headed for us."

2. A continuous quotation should be attributed only once.

Wrong: "It was blatantly unfair," Coach James said. "The officials ruined us with stupid calls," he added. "We'll file a protest with the commissioner," he continued.

Right: "It was blatantly unfair," Coach James said. "The officials ruined us with stupid calls. We'll file a protest with the commissioner."

3. When two or more sentences of direct quotation run continuously, the attribution should be placed within the first sentence.

Wrong: "I will leave that to my social secretary. She is responsible for invitations to parties. If she wants to ask Republicans and ICM members, that is up to her," Gov. Turnbull said.

Right: "I will leave that to my social secretary," Gov. Turnbull said. "She is responsible for invitations to parties. If she wants to ask Republicans and ICM members, that is up to her."

4. When paraphrases (or indirect quotations) and direct quotations are combined in one sentence, the direct quotation should be closed before a new sentence is started.

Wrong: He testified that he was "drunk when the guy was killed. I don't know anything."

Right: He testified that he was "drunk when the guy was killed." He added, "I don't remember anything."

Right: He testified that he was drunk at the time of the killing, adding, "I don't remember anything."

NEWS STORY STRUCTURE

Purpose of the lead ("lead") of a news story:

- A. To capture the reader's interest
- B. To give the reader an immediate understanding of what the story is about.
- C. To provide in capsule form the most main news element(s) of the story.

Purpose of the body of a news story:

- A. To explain and amplify the information in the lead.
- B. To add details relevant to the story.
- C. To provide a context for understanding the significance of the news of the story.

Structuring the news story:

1. Determine the most newsworthy element(s) of the story.
2. Arrange your notes in order of decreasing importance, then make a sketchy paragraph- by-paragraph outline of the order in which you will cover the material.
3. Write an appropriate lead, but do not agonize over it; you can come back later and revise it. It might highlight one or more of many points, or summarize them as a whole
4. Write the next most important facts to come after the lead.
5. Relate the rest of the story in narrative or chronological form. (A summary lead may be more than one paragraph. The full summary should be written before the narrative or chronological relating of details begins.)
6. Use full names (first and last and sometimes title) in first reference. Subsequent reference should be by last name only or informal title/description, such as "the fire chief."
7. Cover only one main idea or subtopic in a paragraph.
8. Keep paragraphs short — sometimes just one sentence, but seldom more

than 5 lines on the computer screen (typed in a standard 12-point font such as Times Roman).

9. See that sentences and paragraphs follow each other logically and smoothly, for continuity and coherence.

10. Use simple, everyday words; if you must use complex or unfamiliar terms, define them within the text for readers.

11. Be concise and direct. Do not use unnecessary words and do not repeat information.

12. Try to begin each paragraph with a significant or interesting fact.

13. Write in third person, except for the use of first and second person pronouns ("I," "we," "my," "our," "you," "your," etc.) in direct quotations.

14. Let readers form their own opinions; do not use opinion adjectives except where attributed to others.

15. Use active voice most of the time, unless the action is more important than who acted.

16. Use specific nouns and verbs that convey more information in fewer words.

17. Include only meaningful, significant detail. Leave out irrelevant information.

18. If you raise a question implicitly, provide the answer; if you can't supply the answer, don't raise the question.

THE DREADED REVERSE ADVANCE LEAD

An advance lead tells readers/listeners that an event or activity is coming up. Its purpose is to provide the "who, what, when, where, and how much" information so that the public can make an informed decision as to whether to attend/participate etc. This is USEFUL INFORMATION.

Example: The Blades Fencing Club will hold its 1999 organizational meeting on Saturday at 3 p.m. in the UVI golf course clubhouse. Information will be available on fencing and training and competition opportunities.

A reverse advance lead is written after the event takes place. It contains the same information as the reverse lead, with the verb(s) changed to past tense.

This is USELESS INFORMATION.

Example: The Blades Fencing Club held its 1999 organizational meeting on Saturday at 3 p.m. in the UVI golf course clubhouse. Information was available on fencing and training and competition opportunities.

Why is it bad? Because it tells people nothing they didn't know before the event took place. The "news" of an event is what happened at the event, not the fact that the event occurred.

Example: The Blades Fencing Club plans to host its second annual summer camp and send a delegation to a fall fencing competition in Aruba, head coach Daren DeWindt said Saturday at the group's 1999 organizational meeting.

DO NOT SUBMIT A STORY THAT BEGINS WITH A REVERSE ADVANCE LEAD!